

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00
PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 L-03 /033 W
-----048300 160658Z /15

P 152100Z AUG 77
FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1079
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY
AMCONSUL MONTREAL
ALL OTHER CANADIAN POSTS (BY POUCH)

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJ: LEVESQUE GETS OPPOSITION BACKING FOR RECIPROCITY AGREEMENTS

REF: QUEBEC 0288

1. QUEBEC'S OPPOSITION PARTIES AUG. 13 ENDORSED IN PRINCIPLE
THE GOQ'S NEWLY-MINTED AMENDMENT (REFTEL) TO BILL 101 PERMITTING
RECIPROCAL LANGUAGE-OF-EDUCATION AGREEMENTS WITH OTHER CANADIAN
PROVINCES. LEVESQUE WILL THEREFORE HAVE ALL-PARTY POLITICAL
BACKING FOR HIS NEGOTIATIONS WITH CANADA'S OTHER PREMIERS AT
INTER-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE AT ST. ANDREWS ON AUGUST 18.

2. BY WAY OF EXPLANATION, LIBERAL MNA ANDRE RAYNAULD TOLD
"LE DEVOIR" THAT HIS PARTY PREFERRED WRITING PROTECTION FOR
MINORITY LANGUAGE RIGHTS INTO THE CONSTITUTION, BUT, FACED
WITH OVERWHELMING PQ STRENGTH IN THE ASSEMBLY, THE LIBERALS HAD
OPTED FOR THE RECIPROCAL AGREEMENTS CONCEPT AS THE "LESSER
OF TWO EVILS." UNION NATIONALE LEADER RODRIGUE BIRON WAS MORE
CATEGORICAL IN HIS APPROVAL FOR THE PQ MEASURE. IF OTHER PREMIERS
DENY QUEBEC'S RIGHT TO NEGOTIATE SUCH AGREEMENTS, HE SAID,
IT WOULD BE "A SERIOUS ERROR AND AN ACT OF COWARDICE THAT COULD
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LEAD TO THE DESTRUCTION OF CANADA."

3. INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS MINISTER CLAUDE MORIN, WHO WILL
ACCOMPANY LEVESQUE TO ST. ANDREWS, CONFESSED TO THE ASSEMBLY
THAT HE WAS NOT SURE PRECISELY WHAT KIND OF AGREEMENT THE PM
WOULD PUSH FOR. IN AN OBVIOUS ATTEMPT NOT TO TIP THE PQ'S
HAND, MORIN SAID THE FINAL SHAPE OF ANY PROPOSED AGREEMENT

WOULD NOT BE DECIDED UNTIL CABINET MEETING JUST PRIOR TO PM'S DEPARTURE. IN ANY CASE, LEVESQUE WILL HAVE PLENTY OF ROOM TO MANEUVER. ONLY ONTARIO AND NEW BRUNSWICK HAVE FRANCOPHONE POPULATIONS LARGE ENOUGH TO MAKE FULL RECIPROCITY AGREEMENTS POSSIBLE. AS FOR THE OTHER PROVINCES, LEVESQUE MAY BE PREPARED TO SETTLE FOR A SIMPLE COMMITMENT IN PRINCIPLE TO IMPROVE FRENCH-LANGUAGE EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT HE MUST BRING HOME SOMETHING FAIRLY CONCRETE TO SATISFY LANGUAGE HARDLINERS IN CABINET HERE.

4. COMMENT: JUDGING FROM FAVORABLE REACTION FROM EVEN MOST SEVERE FRANCOPHONE CRITICS OF GOQ LANGUAGE POLICY, RECIPROCITY GAMBIT APPEARS BE "INGENIOUS AND, AT SAME TIME, POLITICALLY DEFT" AS DESCRIBED BY "LE DEVOIR" EDITORIAL. FINAL IMPRIMATUR OF RESPECTIBILITY WAS GIVEN BY NEW FEDERAL LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER, MAX VALDEN, WHO ENDORSED RECIPROCITY AS "NORMAL" IN RECENT TV INTERVIEW. LEVESQUE HAS SUCCEEDED IN APPEALING TO DEEP TRIBAL SENSE OF GRIEVANCE WHICH TRANSCENDS DIFFERENCES OF PARTY OR NATIONAL STATUS PREFERENCE. OPPOSITION PARTY LEADERS WERE PUT IN POSITION OF EITHER ENDORSING RECIPROCAL RIGHTS OR APPEARING AS TRAITORS TO FRANCOPHONE BROTHERS. ANGLOPHONE PREMIERS ARE LIKELY BE FACED WITH SIMILAR HOBSON'S CHOICE WHERE REJECTION OF RECIPROCITY CAN BE PICTURED AS CONFIRMATION OF ANGLOPHONE UNWILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT LINGUISTIC EQUALITY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AGREEMENTS, PROVINCE, OPPOSITION PARTIES, OFFICIAL LANGUAGE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 15-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977QUEBEC00306
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770294-0946
Format: TEL
From: QUEBEC
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770861/aaaabzrj.tel
Line Count: 86
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: b62c635a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 QUEBEC 288
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19-Jan-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1602176
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LEVESQUE GETS OPPOSITION BACKING FOR RECIPROCITY AGREEMENTS
TAGS: PINT, CA
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/b62c635a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009